

Hands of help and hope

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EDUCATION can lift people out of poverty and secure them a decent life. Yet, many refugee children are denied this chance when they drop out of "schools" and learning centres in order to make ends meet for their families.

Witnessing the refugees and the pain they endured prompted UCSI Scholars Circle (U-Schos) members Suzanne Ling Shook Shian, 23, Tanasha Azalea Suhandani, 21, and Lim Yuet Kim, 26, to start the Hands of Hope (HOH) project in 2014.

The project aims to provide quality education to underserved communities with the aim of equipping them with life skills, to instill the spirit of volunteerism among youth by providing a platform to reach out, and to offer youths an avenue for personal growth and development.

Ling said they came up with the project after realising that a lot of the students in these schools were dropping out due to financial constraints.

"As university students, we can't be giving them money out of our own pockets," she said, adding that HOH has been conducting various fund-raising events, including an annual concert, to keep these underprivileged children in school.

She also said that these funds are used to send the children to IDEAS Academy and the Chin Student Organisation (CSO) Refugee Learning Centre, both independently funded centres.

Through this project, the volunteers also get to share their knowledge and educate the young refugees, said Tanasha Azalea.

Now, two years on and thanks to the relentless fund-raising efforts of HOH volunteers, nine students from the Chin refugee community from Myanmar will be able to continue pursuing their studies with-

out fear of missing out on lessons or dropping out of school.

They were the lucky top students of their school to receive sponsorships under the Sponsor-A-Teen programme.

The programme funds the education of selected teenagers by subsidising school fees, textbooks, transportation and additional education materials.

To celebrate this milestone,

HOH recently held a Recognition Day for them, which also saw UCSI Group founder and chief executive officer Datuk Peter Ng presenting a mock cheque for RM12,362 for the project.

At the event, Lim also conducted a choir performance by the refugee children.

She said that music is one of the vocational lessons taught by the volunteers to these children.

Lim, a music graduate from UCSI University, points out that it is important for them to be equipped with as many skills as possible to ensure they can survive in the real world.

IDEAS founding president Tunku Zain Al-'Abidin Tuanku Muhriz said he is impressed with HOH's work in ensuring that the refugee children remain in school.

He encouraged the refugee children to do their best to absorb knowledge whenever they have the chance.

"I've always felt that there are always things to learn from every facet of life," he added.

Expressing her gratitude to HOH during her speech, a refugee teenager who goes by the name Cherry said she wouldn't have had the chance to continue studying if it wasn't for the sponsorship.

"Thank you so much for all your help, and we are also sorry because sometimes we were very naughty and made

you sad and angry," she told the audience who included their parents and HOH volunteers.

"You helped us with education to move from darkness to light and come closer to achieving our ambitions," she added.

With this sponsorship, Cherry will be able to continue studying at IDEAS Academy. It is also the place where she will enjoy her computer lessons with the HOH volunteers.

Though shy when approached, another sponsorship recipient Anna (not her real name) said she is very happy to receive the sponsorship as it is "very good for us".

Since the establishment of HOH, a total of 150 students have volunteered with the project, reaching out to children from a special needs school, a children's home and two refugee schools.

Every semester, HOH sends students to volunteer at underserved communities by providing extra classes for the children, mainly in English, Mathematics and Science.



For a good cause: Ng (right) holds the mock cheque he presented with (from left) Tanasha Azalea, Yuet Kim and Suzanne.